

# NATO can defend itself

By Dana Adams Schmidt

Washington

The Pentagon has reversed its thinking about the defense of Europe. It used to argue that the NATO countries would have to use nuclear weapons to overcome vast Soviet superiority in numbers. It now says that NATO is in many respects equal to or superior to the Warsaw Pact; that the nuclear trip-wire need never be sprung because Western Europe plus its North American allies could stand off a conventional attack by the Soviet Union and its East European allies.

This is the conclusion of elaborate studies, probably the most thorough ever made, by the United States Army, Navy, and Air Force during the past two years.

The essential results of the studies were incorporated by Secretary of State Rogers in his address to the NATO foreign ministers in Copenhagen last month, much to the chagrin of NATO officials who had just released a study of their own reflecting the traditional view that NATO is hopelessly inferior.

The studies were directed by former Army Secretary Robert F. Froehke and Assistant Secretary of Defense Gardiner L. Tucker with inputs from the CIA. Air Force and Navy are still at work on parts of their companion studies and the Maritime Commission has been studying the amount of shipping that could get past Russian submarines.

Here are some of the highlights:

The Russians and their allies have 216 Army divisions including 42 on the Chinese border. But only 85 of those divisions are identified as the "designated threat" — that is, certain, because of their locations, to be committed to battle in central Europe. An "augmented threat" produced by drawing troops from Moscow, the Chinese and other borders, would amount to 123 divisions.

These forces might seem overwhelming were it not for the fact that Russian divisions are about half the size of those of the U.S. and NATO and only 50 percent of them are combat ready, with 10 or 15 percent of their men and equipment. Another third are at half strength and the rest at 25 percent of full strength. (The latter are experienced men intended to form a nucleus for reserve formations.)

Translate these divisions into U.S. Army terms and the Warsaw bloc threat shrinks to

threat" of 48 to 56 divisions and an "augmented threat" of 72 to 78 divisions.

Against the Communists NATO could muster troops, European ready reserves, and U.S.-based reinforcements that could be shifted to Europe in 90 days of 44 to 52 divisions.

The American analysts believe NATO could hold out against the "designated threat" for 90 days and against the "worst threat" for 70 days. While NATO is numerically inferior the inferiority is nowhere near as great as had appeared in earlier intelligence calculations on the basis of which it was reasoned that NATO could hold out for only two or three weeks. And the picture is vastly improved in the light of the following:

o 1. The U.S. is equipping its Army with a new generation of mortar and artillery shells five times more effective than those of the past. NATO will get similar weapons but the Russians have nothing like them. The U.S. component in NATO is being beefed up rapidly with the latest combat equipment from Vietnam.

o 2. With numbers of aircraft about 5,000 to 6,000 on both sides, NATO's jet fighters are better, with greater range and endurance. U.S. and NATO attack planes are "strikingly superior."

o 3. Russian submarines might take terrible toll of 25 to 50 percent of NATO supply ships in the first 30 days, but over a period of 90 days submarine losses would amount to 70 to 90 percent after which NATO losses would drop to only 10 to 20 percent.

The Soviet Union would probably go all out for victory in the first 30 days; those 30 days would be decisive. Over a longer period the American analysts believe the Warsaw Pact countries would run into logistical difficulties in replenishing their manpower and supplies because the Eastern communications network is far inferior to that of the West. Over the longer period, they believe, a stalemate could be established, negotiations begun, and nuclear war avoided.

One may wonder why it took a quarter of a century to come up with a fair assessment of the supposed Russian juggernaut. Among the reasons are that most earlier calculations ignored the difference in size between Warsaw Pact and NATO divisions. Qualitative differences between East-

ern and Western equipment was usually ignored. Recent assessments usually omitted French forces which have not been formally part of the military alliance since General de Gaulle withdrew France, but which would surely be committed to battle once the war began. German territorial militia, which are equipped as light infantry, were not previously included. Furthermore U.S. and British air defenses were omitted from many earlier calculations because they are not formally under NATO command.

Perhaps the biggest reason, however, is that the military preferred it that way. It helped keep their budgets up.

Now, however, a new consideration has arisen. The U.S. is trying to lead the Western alliance, and inveigle a reluctant Soviet Union, into negotiations on mutual balanced force reductions. Under pressure from Congress to reduce the Army of 300,000 Americans in Europe, the U.S. Government is anxious to extract some advantage in the way of comparable Warsaw Pact reductions.

Whether arguing the case with the Russians or with Congress it is essential that the U.S. Government — and the American people — operate from correct premises.

Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer, the former Supreme Commander of NATO, was confronted during a lecture appearance here the other day with the facts presented by the new Pentagon study. "Oh," he replied with a big smile, "that comes as no surprise to me. We at NATO headquarters understood the picture right along." And he added one more point: that the military usually figures that it takes a superiority of 3 to 1 to mount a successful attack against well-prepared positions — a superiority the Warsaw Pact forces are far from enjoying.

Dana Adams Schmidt is Pentagon correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor.